

VZCZCXRO8474
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHIHL #0053/01 1291209
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 081209Z MAY 08
FM REO HILLAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1080
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 1146

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 HILLAH 000053

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/8/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: BABIL AND THE POLITICS OF SECURITY

REF: (A) HILLAH 29; (B) 2007 HILLAH 169 (C) BAGHDAD 43; (D) 2007 HILLAH 176; (E) 2007 HILLAH 139
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CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth M. Hillas, Team Leader, PRT Babil,
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1. (U) This is a PRT Babil cable.

2. (C) SUMMARY: The ISF emerged from the late March clashes with Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) with a renewed sense of strength, demonstrating an ability to better coordinate IP and IA actions. It has not been able, however, to build on that success, largely due to the Governor prioritizing political control over enhancement of the ISF's capabilities. The political neutrality of the ISF is threatened, and the few strong ISF commanders increasingly feel targeted for removal or elimination. Iranian intelligence infiltration of the ISF in recent months - promoted by the Governor - poses a serious challenge. Together with continued shortfalls in equipment and manning and with the potential for ISCI/Badr and Dawa to pack two new IP Battalions with their personnel, the transition to PIC faces real problems. END SUMMARY.

3. (C) The ISF conducted itself fairly well in the March 25-30 clashes around the province (Hillah, Hashimiya, Hamza and Kifl) with JAM partisans, although the presence or proximity of U.S. forces probably played a key role in stiffening ISF resolve. The IP and IA showed an improved ability to coordinate their actions, and the ISF emerged from this test with a sense of renewed strength and increased public support. (Ref A) That support, however, was not matched by the province's political leadership. There is a rising sense of dissatisfaction within the ISF's ranks with its leadership, which is viewed - with a notable exception - as weak or politically controlled by the Governor.

ISCI's Iran Ties

4. (S) Despite the fact that in recent weeks the public has become much more aware and critical of Iran's role in promoting instability through funding, training and arming of JAM and other criminal groups, there has been virtually no effort to address Iranian influence on the ISF. The IP Director of Intelligence, a high-ranking Badr leader, COL Majid al-Shimmari (Abu Ahmad al-Shayabani), is known to have ties to Iranian intelligence, as is Abu Muhammad al-Issawi, Babil's Deputy ISCI party leader. Majid's profile and power increased significantly after the assassination of then PDOP Gen Qais Hamza Abud al-Mamuri in December 2007, who had previously limited the intelligence department's authority. (Ref B) Indeed, Col Majid may well have had a direct hand in Qais' murder. (Ref C) Another known Iranian agent of influence is the Governor's personal advisor, LTC Thamir Ghazala (Abu Huda). Both these individuals are in positions that allow them to exercise a malignant influence on ISF commanders.

How the ISF Is Kept Under Wraps

5. (C) The Governor and his ISCI/Badr surrogates have succeeded

in recent months in subordinating the ISF. His tools have been intimidation, dependency, elimination and micro-management. BG Abd al-Amir, who was a strong and politically independent IA commander, seems domesticated by comparison and no longer willing to resist the Governor's directives. The change can be dated to the December assassination of PDOP Qais.

16. (S) MG Fadhil Raddad, on the other hand, whose nomination and appointment as PDOP is embroiled in controversy, has not been officially recognized by the Provincial Council (PC). (Ref D) Fired as PDOP two years ago for incompetency and never renowned as a strong leader, he has met expectations as a weak and dependent IP commander. Independent journalist Ali al-Rubai was in police headquarters during the initial clashes on March 25. He reported that Fadhil did not give orders when needed; that he responded slowly if at all; and that he refused to talk to the press because he "had nothing to add to the governor's remarks." Moreover, none of the PRT's contacts attribute the ISF success to Fadhil's leadership or operational prowess. Deputy Provincial Council Chairman Dr. Na'amah Jasim said that the current peace is only because Sadr is in a "state of recalculation."

17. (C) Fadhil has been a tool of the Governor in reducing the independence of SWAT Commander Abbas, who technically is a part of the IP but has always had a great deal of independence because of the effectiveness of his forces, which have been trained and equipped by the CF. Abbas now believes he is being targeted for removal or, like Qais, elimination. In recognition of the solid performance of two of Babil's SWAT companies under

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Abbas' command in the Basrah fighting in early April, the Minister of Interior has put SWAT under his direct command, according to Abbas, who sees this as a mixed blessing.

18. (S) During the late March clashes with JAM, Governor Salam Salih Mahdi al-Muslimawi directly managed ISF operations in the province. However, he was not suited to the role. At the first sign of trouble - even before the onset of any real fighting - the Governor called the PRT seeking "American air cover" to save his home town of Kifl from a JAM "uprising." His panicked reaction to events throughout the week was reflected in his efforts to micro-manage operations, at times creating coordination problems with the CF.

19. (C) When it was not the Governor, it was Provincial Council Chairman Muhammad Ali Hussayn al-Massudi (PCC) calling the PRT with frantic requests for air support, weapons, and vehicles. According to the PCC, the ISF were out-gunned, out-numbered, and lacked the vehicles to quickly move forces from one part of the province to the next. The latter was in fact true, but the PDOP's response to this has been to try to take newly provided MOI vehicles away from SWAT, one of the most effective combat forces in the province. The Governor and PDOP want to weaken Abbas, and have proven incapable of communicating their own needs to MOI.

110. (S) A man with a fifth grade education and little natural intelligence, Governor Salam's influence over the ISF appears to have only grown in the wake of the clashes. It was made abundantly clear in late March that the IP in the south (Hamza, Hashamiyah, Kifl and Qasim) were heavily infiltrated by militias and incapable of handling the limited militia threat. One of the lessons the Governor drew from the experience was that he needed to fill the ISF with politically reliable cadres - and he has embarked on that path. According to several PRT sources including Abbas, Deputy PDOP BG Faris, and IP Brigades Operational Commander BG Abd al-Rahman Thayaban Mirza, the Governor and Dawa provincial party leader Abu Ahmed al-Basri are in the process of dividing up the positions to be filled in creating two new IP battalions that have been authorized by the MOI. Currently, the only way to enter a Babil IP Academy class is with the signature of either Abu Ahmad or Abu Muhammad, the Dawa and ISCI party leaderships respectively, on your application.

DAWA and ISCI Differences

111. (C) Notable differences remain between provincial Dawa and ISCI leaders regarding how to deal with OMS/JAM and Iran. While repudiating JAM and supporting Maliki's call for militias to lay

down their arms, the governor surrounds himself with many who have known ties to Iranian intelligence. Moreover, COL Majid was allowed to emplace his men at checkpoints on the eastern border of the province during the late-March fighting, despite his ties to Sayid al-Shuhada (Office of the Lord of the Martyrs). Na'amah has made clear to us his concern over the ties that the Governor and his cronies have with Iran, which Na'amah recognizes as working against Iraq's interests.

¶12. (SBU) The IP's weak leadership and the possible outflow of criminal elements from Baghdad as a result of pressure there, may have contributed to a string of targeted abductions and robberies in Babil linked to the IP. On April 10, Dr. Muhammad al-Ta'i, a prominent surgeon and teacher, was abducted from his home by men in police uniforms, driving police vehicles, and eventually released for USD 120,000 in ransom. On April 17, Babil University Professor Dr. Sa'ad's home was broken into by men in police uniforms who took money and gold before driving off in police vehicles. Dr. Sa'ad told the PRT that he immediately called Fadhil to inform him of the incident, but that the PDOP seemed disinterested and unaffected by the crime.

Ready for PIC?

¶13. (C) The ISF and provincial leaderships' shortcomings pose a challenge for transitioning to PIC. In September 2007 the Governor was provided a laundry list of needs prior to the province accepting control of the security portfolio. (Ref E) The list included completion of the Joint Operations Center and complete formation and outfitting of the provincial IP. There has been minimal progress in these areas.

¶14. (C) BG Abd al-Rahman argued that without proper border security or any aerial reconnaissance assets Iran poses a significant problem to Babil. Governance Center Security Director Colonel Fadhil Ali echoed these concerns, telling us that there is no provincial border security and weapons come flooding into the province from Iran without any restraints. The fact that the Governor replaced the Hashamiyah IP Chief with a Badr member, and that COL Majid has taken control of staffing

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the eastern provincial checkpoints, compounds this problem. COL Fadhil gloomily predicts that within two years all the IP will be affiliated with Iran. There are politicians who share these concerns. Even some politicians with pro-Sadrism leanings, such as Provincial Council member Murtada Kamal, agree that Babil is not yet ready to take over the security file.

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